

Brothers in Mission: Alexander Farquharson of Cape Breton and Archibald Farquharson of Tiree

MARGARET A. MACKAY, B.A., Dip. Scot. Stud., Ph.D.

In the early 1830s two brothers from Perthshire, Alexander (1793-1858) and Archibald (1800-1878) Farquharson, left mainland Scotland for pioneer work in the mission field. Both went to areas where a need for their message and talents had been perceived. Both were to serve a scattered population of Gaelic-speakers in work and in circumstances which were physically as well as emotionally demanding, and the methods and resources they were to employ were very similar. There are other parallels too, but one striking difference: Alexander (fig. 1) crossed the Atlantic to Cape Breton, a large island offshore from mainland Nova Scotia; Archibald (fig. 2) journeyed to the small Scottish island of Tiree and made it a base for preaching activity in the Inner and Outer Hebrides for over forty years.

The work of these two missionaries is documented in their reports to the bodies with which they were associated and in histories of their respective denominations, Church of Scotland/ Presbyterian in the case of Alexander, Congregational or Independent in the case of Archibald. But such formal sources cannot indicate the intersection of the private and the public in the lives of men such as these; on the other hand, oral tradition, family history and a clutch of remarkable letters and poems retained in private hands provide insights into the kin-based and spiritual relationships existing between these brothers and among their wider network of siblings and relations, even though, as Alexander put it in a letter to his brother Thomas in Straloch, "the great Atlantic ocean with its mighty billows rolls between us". Their cultural background as Gaelic-speaking Perthshire highlanders, the social, economic and religious contexts in which they were active, their methods of working and the means by which they communicated private griefs, joys or other emotions, are revealed in such sources. Of particular interest is the

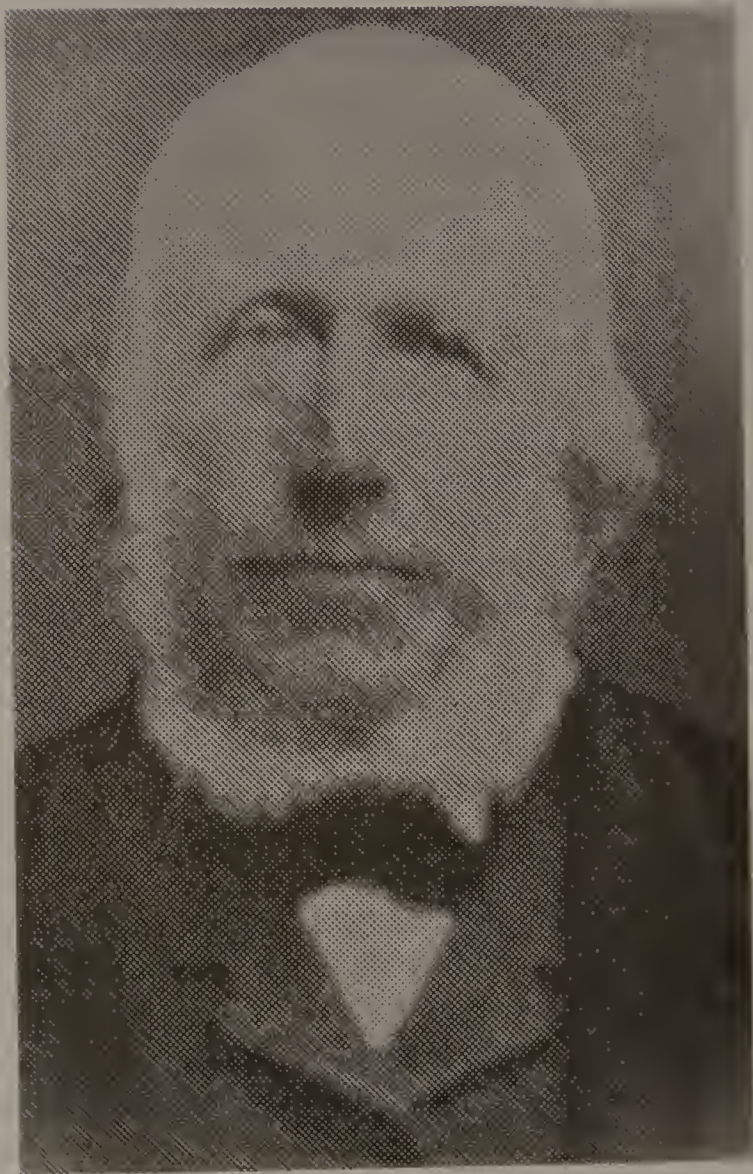


Figure 1: Alexander Farquharson



Henry W. McIsaac

OBAN, N.B.

Figure 2: Archibald Farquharson

mediation between secular culture and religious expression in Archibald's poetic output. A collection of his sermon outlines has also survived, providing scope for further study of a preacher in context.¹

Although the focus here is primarily on Alexander and Archibald, letters from their brothers John, a joiner, boatbuilder and ploughwright, and Finlay, a farmer, also contribute to the picture. They were emigrants to what is now Ontario (previously "Upper Canada", later "Canada West"), settling in Moore Township in Lambton County, in the south-west corner of the province near present-day Sarnia. A nephew, son of their brother Thomas, who stayed in Scotland on the home place, ended his days in Dawson City in the Yukon Territory of northern Canada. All the extant letters are written in English, though each man at times incorporated Gaelic words and passages, and sometimes poetry, to express particularly personal matters or provide an explanation using familiar vocabulary. Alexander asks affectionately for a niece in Gaelic in his first letter home from Canada, "Am bheil cuin aic air *Unk* fhast" [trans.: Does she still remember Unk]. John, on his part, refers to a condition which came to affect Finlay's legs as "codal deilgan" (*cadal deilgneach*), numbness or "pins and needles".

The Perthshire background

They were sons of sheep-farmer John Farquharson (1765-1840) and his wife Isabel Robertson, a native of the parish of Blair Atholl, who were "booked" for marriage on 8 March, 1792 and who lived in Glenfernate, Straloch, Strathardle, in north-east Perthshire. Alexander was the eldest of ten children – nine sons and one daughter – born to the couple, while Archibald was seven years younger. Their upbringing meant that they were able to empathise with the rural populations among whom they worked, and Archibald's correspondence shows that he was always

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are taken from the family manuscripts, all previously unpublished. I am grateful to the late Tearlach and Ena MacGregor Whyte of Oban and Tiree for access to these and for permission to use and quote them and for their encouragement of research on the Farquharsons.

interested in stock and crops, and the nature and quality of any sheep-tending he encountered on his preaching tours.

The parish ministers who described the parishes of Moulin and Kirkmichael, which incorporate parts of Strathardle, for Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account* of the 1790s² remark on the exposed nature of the Strath, its shallow soil and late growing season, the dry, cold climate of the district and the flocks of sheep which were then to be seen in increasing numbers. Oats, bere (barley), flax and potatoes were the main crops of the parish, which exported oak bark for the tanning of leather, linen yarn and wool fleeces, beef and mutton. Some of the land was still worked in run-rig and peat for fuel was secured from associated mosses, though supplies were being depleted as a result of whisky distilling. "One still consumes as much peat as would serve five families." There were two of these licensed in the parish of Moulin and twenty-four licensed retailers of ale, beer and other spirits while "at the fairs, every house, hut and shed in the respective villages is converted into a dram shop". Temperance matters were to feature in the brothers' correspondence.

The language principally spoken in these parishes was Gaelic, with Scots or English also understood and used in transactions with non-Gaelic speakers. For the next hundred years Gaelic remained the first language of the majority of the inhabitants (between fifty and seventy-five per cent of the population in 1891),³ and the local dialect was to be heard in the district until the 1950s.⁴ The poetic and narrative traditions

² Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1792-98). The Rev. Alexander Stewart compiled the Moulin account (vol. v, 1793, 50-74); the Rev. Allan Stewart compiled the Kirkmichael account (vol. xv, 1795, 506-22).

³ Charles W. J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland 1698-1981* (Edinburgh, 1984), 218-19.

⁴ Data in the Linguistic Survey of Scotland (Gaelic), School of Scottish Studies Archives, University of Edinburgh. Cathair Ó Dochartaigh, ed., *Survey of Gaelic Dialects of Scotland*, vol. 1 (Dublin, 1997), 73-4, 93-5. See also: M. Ó Murchú, *East Perthshire Gaelic: Social history, phonology, texts and lexicon* (Dublin, 1989).

of highland society were exemplified in the area, and instrumental music was played and its exponents esteemed. Among these were the members of the Gow family, active in the district with a repertoire for fiddle and other string instruments which incorporated tunes of both highland and lowland composition, and songs in both Gaelic and Scots were in circulation. One of the earliest collections of native Scottish airs is the Straloch MS and the inhabitants of the parish at home and in community activities such as fairs and weddings had access to a wide range of music including, importantly for this family, that of the bagpipe.⁵ It is no exaggeration to say that at the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth Perthshire was in the centre of piping in Scotland. The local gentry employed pipers in their households, and the Highland Society of London's piping competitions in Edinburgh attracted scores of Perthshire musicians, with pipers by the name of Farquharson among the prize-winners on several occasions.⁶

During the brothers' formative years, their home district of Perthshire was among the areas of the highlands which witnessed itinerant missionary activity of an unprecedented sort. A number of societies sponsored this work, which received its main support from the Baptist, Congregational, and Relief or Secession churches, but the two individuals most intimately connected with its genesis were Robert and James Haldane who, stimulated by the impetus to foreign missions in late eighteenth-century Britain, founded the Society for the Propagation of the Bible at Home in 1797. Preaching and exhortation, the distribution of Bibles and tracts in Gaelic and the freedom and flexibility which came from operating in a manner which was not limited by parish boundaries or institutions characterised the activities of the itinerants, and there existed a close connection with the Societies for the Support of Gaelic Schools, created under similar impetus in the

⁵ Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (London, 1966), 122, 214 ff.

⁶ Information courtesy of Mr Iain MacInnes.

early nineteenth century to extend knowledge of the scriptures in the native tongue.⁷

John Farquharson, a native of Glen Tilt, studied with the Haldanes and undertook extensive missionary work in Breadalbane, before emigrating to Nova Scotia c. 1806/7, where he died in 1820. There is no evidence that he was related to the Straloch Farquharsons, but his reputation for Gaelic eloquence made a great impression on Archibald, as he related in his 1872 pamphlet *The unsectarian Gaelic mission for highlanders*. "Being a man full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith, he began to preach to the people in the tongue wherein they were born, and, with that tongue of fire, set the whole of Breadalbane, and other places in the Highlands, in a flame."⁸ James Kennedy of Aberfeldy, who was responsible for a revival in Strathardle and district beginning in 1820, was a more direct mentor,⁹ while James Douglas of Cavers, for whom Archibald worked as a gamekeeper before taking up his studies,¹⁰ may well have given him the encouragement he provided to others.

The correspondence of John and Finlay too shows them to be well acquainted with scripture and inclined to include texts, prayers and exhortations as well as family news and reports on local conditions in their letters. John urges his brother Thomas in a letter of August 8, 1842 not to neglect family worship. "Perhaps you may think that I am now to Preach or teach you. I have more need to be taught. You know we are

⁷ Professor Donald E. Meek has opened up this subject in a range of publications and the author is indebted to him for these and for his personal communications and interest. See his "Evangelical Missionaries in the Early Nineteenth-Century Highlands", *Scottish Studies*, vol. 28 (1987), 1-34, and "The Independent and Baptist Churches of Highland Perthshire and Strathspey", *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, vol. lvi (1988-90), 269-343.

⁸ Archibald Farquharson, *The unsectarian Gaelic mission for highlanders* (Glasgow, 1872), 7-8.

⁹ William D. McNaughton, *Early Congregational Independency in the Highlands and Islands and the North-East of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2003), 80-81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81, 505.

ordered in Heb. 13 and 13 vers to exhort one another daily, while it is called Today." On 1 March, 1850 he requests Thomas to send with an emigrant coming out, a copy of the Gaelic poems of The Rev. Dr John MacDonald of Ferintosh (1779-1849), "the Apostle of the North", who had been a central figure in the Breadalbane revival of 1816-1817.¹¹ The volume requested may have been his 1848 collection, published in Edinburgh in the year before his death. Insights are given in the letters on the ways in which the missionary activity which characterised their home district when they were youths and young men helped structure their world view and discourse.

To Cape Breton

The impact of this missionary movement was felt in the evangelical wing of the Church of Scotland and the Rev. Alexander McLeod of the Gaelic Chapel in Dundee is credited with guiding Alexander Farquharson into its ministry, prior to studies at Dundee Grammar School and thereafter Glasgow and Edinburgh. The process by which Alexander was commissioned and sent to Cape Breton by the Edinburgh Ladies' Association, formed in 1832 from the Edinburgh Auxiliary of the Glasgow Colonial Society (1825), and his subsequent career, have been thoroughly traced by Professor Laurie Stanley in *The Well-Watered Garden: The Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton 1798-1860*.¹² The Committee was acting in response to a need identified by ministers sent earlier to other parts, notably the Rev. John Maclellan of Belfast, Prince Edward Island. On a tour of Cape Breton in the autumn of 1827 he and his companion, the Rev. Donald A. Fraser, had encountered hundreds of Protestant Gaelic-speaking families, both recent arrivals and established settlers from the highlands and islands of Scotland, who had been until then without regular or satisfactory spiritual guidance. In a communication of 4 February 1828 he pressed

¹¹ See entry by R. Macleod in N. M. de S. Cameron *et al.*, edd., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), 510-11.

¹² Laurie Stanley, *The Well-Watered Garden: The Presbyterian Church in Cape Breton, 1798-1860* (Sydney, 1983).

an urgent request for assistance on the Society and it was the Ladies' Association, under the energetic Mrs Isabella Gordon Mackay, who took on Cape Breton as its "special cause" and Alexander Farquharson as its first missionary there. Amongst the letters of recommendation in support of his appointment came one from Dr Thomas Chalmers, certifying that on 23 April, 1833 Alexander Farquharson had given an "exceedingly good popular sermon" in the Divinity Hall at Edinburgh. A former fellow-student, the Rev. William Stewart of Lochee, wrote of his appropriateness for missionary work in Cape Breton "as the Gaelic language is more familiar with him than the English", adding that he also "preached with much acceptance in the English language".

On Sunday, 16th June, 1833, Alexander Farquharson departed for Canada from Greenock, equipped with a supply of Gaelic Bibles, New Testaments, catechisms and tracts on the *Jane Hastie*, unfortunately just missing his brother John who had left the same port for Canada two days earlier. He arrived in Halifax five weeks later, on 21st July, and on 9th September he wrote a letter to his brother Thomas in Straloch from Newcastle, Mirimachi, New Brunswick, intending to send it with the captain of a vessel called the *Isabella* which was leaving for Scotland the following day (for the letter in full, see Appendix 1). In it he gives an account of his first seven weeks in the Maritimes. From Halifax he had sent his luggage to Sydney and had travelled himself by coach to Pictou to see the Nova Scotian ministers gathering at a Communion there. He writes,

In the town of Pictou I landed at the house of Donald Fergusson cousin to the Fergusson's at the Milton of Inverchroskie [between Straloch and Kirkmichael], who came out fifteen years ago and was shipwrecked near Cape Breton and lost all that he had. I lived in his house a week and I never met with a more kind family than himself and his wife were to me all my life. Though he lost all that he had when [he] came out from Scotland yet by his own industry he has recovered again. He has a good deal of land, property and several valuable houses in the town of Pictou.

From Pictou Alexander went on to Cape Breton and was conveyed by stages most of the way to Sydney in boats manned by Highland people he met. "When I reached the town where my luggage was I got a letter from the Moderator of the Presbytery of this Province from which I now write you to appear in this town on the 4th of September in order to be ordained by the Presbytery ... I then had to retrace my steps backward again and proceed on a journey of nearly four hundred miles." Again he journeyed in stages, preaching as he went, and was duly ordained. He assisted in the administration of a historic Lord's Supper on 15 September 1833 at the Gut of Canso (the waters separating Cape Breton from mainland Nova Scotia, now crossed by a causeway) – the first in Presbyterian form in the island.

Alexander Farquharson itinerated throughout Cape Breton for two years, and was settled in Middle River, serving Lake Ainslie and Margaree as well, in 1834, though he continued to travel and serve other areas throughout his life. He outlined to Mrs Mackay a plan for a parochial system in Cape Breton similar to that at home in Scotland, and prepared a list of ten proposed parishes. The same year elders were ordained and two sessions created. In 1836 the Presbytery of Cape Breton was established, and the Presbyterian order of church government was set in place.

While the parish system which he instituted imposed its own responsibilities, Alexander Farquharson was known for his itinerating tours, nurture of far-flung parishioners and participation in communion seasons. On 29 September, 1837 John wrote to their father in Straloch reporting that he had recently received a letter from Alexander, "written in haste on the 3rd day of May". He had built a good house and a large barn, had a number of acres under crop and three cows, fifteen sheep and a mare. Alexander does not seem to have been as regular as correspondent as the others. On 18 June, 1842 John wrote to Archibald saying that he had had no direct news of their brother in Cape Breton since that letter of 1837 – "stir him up to write us" – but information had reached him by another route.

Last spring one night a Rough looking Irish-man came in and asked lodging. I told him I had not a very good way for him as I had only one bed. I asked him where he came from he said he came from Cape Breton – I told him to sit down, and we comenced [*sic*] talking. I found he was well acquainted with our Brother. He said he is as well liked as any minister in the Island and very much respected he said he preaches in two Parishes and has four churches to preach in and put all those Highlanders from drinking spirits but not from Bag Pipes that in every house mostly there is a piper. If you write him soon you may mention that I have seen the man his name is Thomas Boaz.

Alexander's base remained Middle River until his death in 1858. He is buried there and his pioneering work is commemorated in the name of the Middle River Church, Farquharson Memorial (fig. 3).

To Tiree

In the year after Alexander was finally settled at Middle River, his brother Archibald was "set apart" to be pastor of a church of eleven members on the island of Tiree, to which he had come three years earlier in 1832 after a preliminary visit in 1831. Tiree had had a visitation from an Independent preacher, Malcolm Maclaurin, during an itinerating tour in 1823 and converts had been made. The outermost of the Inner Hebrides, about forty miles off the west coast, it was deemed both a needful focus in itself and an excellent base for missionary activities in the Western Isles. But while Alexander had taken the path into the Church of Scotland, Archibald was an Independent minister. Trained in Glasgow University and the Glasgow Theological Academy under Greville Ewing D.D. and Ralph Wardlaw D.D. he was first a missionary to Greenock's Gaelic-speaking population and a preacher in the Paisley print fields. From 1832, however, he served as an Agent of the Congregational Union of Scotland in Tiree and he was there until his death in 1878. His career has been researched by the Rev. Dr William D. McNaughton for his monumental volumes on Scottish



Figure 3: Farquharson Memorial Church, Middle River, Cape Breton

Congregational history,¹³ with the more personal material now contributing to a comprehensive understanding of his life.

Some of those converted in Tiree by Maclaurin in 1823 became Baptists. From at least 1824 the Baptist Duncan MacDougall from the Ross of Mull was working in the island as a Gaelic charity school teacher and preaching as well. His work culminated in the creation of the Tiree Baptist Church in 1838¹⁴ and set a firm foundation for Baptist activity in the island which has continued to this day. Like Farquharson, MacDougall was a Gaelic poet and hymn composer and it is fascinating to reflect on the religious profile of Tiree in the period as each denomination reached out to the local populace. The Church of Scotland was served in Tiree during Farquharson's time by Neil Maclean (in Tiree 1817-1859) and by John Gregorson Campbell (in Tiree 1861-1891), the noted Gaelic folklore collector. Maclean was the author of the 1843 description of the parish for the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, which appears to underestimate the strength of dissenting support there when compared with Farquharson's annual reports and those of other visitors.¹⁵

Family tradition has it that Farquharson and his family first lodged in a storehouse at Scarinish harbour (fig. 4), where his earliest preaching also took place. But his beginnings in Tiree were far from auspicious. Less than two months after their arrival, his wife, Mary Macdonald from Glen Lyon, died (8th October, 1832), leaving him with two small daughters, Eliza and Isabelle. His sister-in-law Christian

¹³ In *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794-1993* (Glasgow, 1993) and the volume referred to above, the Rev. Dr William D. McNaughton has provided an invaluable resource for the study of this denomination. The Rev. Dr Harry Escott, author of *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow, 1960) provided advice at an early stage.

¹⁴ Donald E. Meek, *Island Harvest: a history of Tiree Baptist Church 1838-1988* (Edinburgh, 1988).

¹⁵ The parish account for Tiree and Coll was drawn up in March 1840 and published in *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. vii (Edinburgh, 1845), 195-222.



TIREE. THE HARBOUR, SCARINISH.

Figure 4: Harbour, Scarinish, Tiree

MacDonald came to keep house for him and help raise the children, and in time married Charles MacLean, turner in the township of Cornaig and member of a family with a long history in the island. Their son Donald was to marry Margaret Ann Farquharson, daughter of the brother Thomas and his wife Elizabeth Forbes in Straloch. The connection with Tiree was thus reinforced and like Alexander in Cape Breton, Archibald remained there for the rest of his life. His daughters were both married to ministers, Eliza to the Tiree-born Baptist James MacFarlane, Isabelle to Charles Whyte, Independent pastor, first in Appin and Lismore and then in Oban.

The grief he felt on the death of his young wife Farquharson expressed in a moving elegy of forty-two verses, which he circulated in printed form,¹⁶ in which he described his situation, far from his relatives and from hers:

Ach an eilean lom fuar
 Fad air astar 's a chuan;
 A's na tonnan a bual' gu garg,
 Air na creagaibh gu dluth,
 Ann an sealladh mo shul'
 'S iad a bristeadh le buirich gharbh.

[On a cold, bare island away out over the sea, with the waves fiercely breaking on the rocks close by, within my view, breaking with a might roar.]

He employs the metaphor of sea and waves again when he describes his wife's conversion at the age of sixteen, how like a ship she changed direction and reached peace through the turbulence. Before warning the unconverted that they are sailing towards eternal anguish, Farquharson offers his gratitude to the islanders who supported him, an incomer, in his time of crisis:

¹⁶ A print entitled *Cumha* (Elegy) survives but no printer, place of publication or date are given.

A's an deireadh mo dhain,
 Ghuidhinn sith agus gras
 Dhoibhsean 'sheasadh a'n gradh rium dluth;
 Anns an deuchainn bha cruaidh,
 Gu co-mhothachail suaire',
 S mi a' m' choigreach air chuairt 'nan dui'ch.

[And at the end of my poem I would wish, peace and grace to those who lovingly stood by me in the hard trial, with sympathy and kindness, although I was a stranger to their island.]

Archibald also composed a poem for Alexander some years after his departure for Cape Breton. It went through several revisions, which he sent to family members at different stages from 1837 onwards, and one version was published as "Cuimhneachan" (A Memento) in his small volume on the Atonement, *Beachdan aithghearr* (1843).¹⁷ He begins by reminding his brother of the day they last saw each other last, at a funeral in the churchyard of Kirkmichael. Although technically in the Parish of Moulin, where their births were registered, the Farquharsons frequented the church of Kirkmichael, which was much closer to where they lived than the Moulin church.

Mo bheannachd dhuit an drasda
 A bhrathair th'ann Ceap-breatan thall,
 Ge fad thu uam 's an fhasach
 Mo chridh tha 'n gradh gle cheangailt riut;
 'S ann ann an cladh Cill-mhicheil,
 Aig eaglaise na sgireachd,
 Far am bheil na miltean
 Nan luidh sinne a dhealaich sinn.

[My greetings to you now brother over the sea in Cape Breton, though far from me in the wilderness my heart is closely bound to

¹⁷ Archibald Farquharson, *Beachdan aithghearr ann fharsinneachd iobhairt-reitich Chrìosd* ... (Glasgow, 1843), 19-20.

you in love; it was in Kirkmichael churchyard at the parish church where there are thousands lying sleeping that we parted.]

The poem goes on to describe walks through the glens and over the moors which they experienced together, a sudden and powerful storm acting as a metaphor for conviction of sin, and the reminder of grace which came when the sun reappeared. (A full text appears in Appendix 2.) In another version, in manuscript only, he includes a vivid account of rounding up sheep, with a striking evocation of the sights and sounds of such a day.

Although Archibald was ordained over a church in Tiree with only eleven members, the decade which followed saw a sizeable increase in his congregations with over two hundred added to the number, periods of revival and a consequent need for the construction or identification of meeting places. He had preaching stations throughout the island, one of the earliest being erected on the Drumbuie common, where ruins which were described by a local tradition-bearer, Hector Kennedy, Hilipol, in 1976 as “Taigh-searmoin Mhic Fhearchair”, Farquharson’s Preaching House, may still be seen. In the township of Ruaig his chapel is now a dwelling-house, while in Cornaig, the township in which he lived, another is still prominent (fig. 5) though disused.

A good deal may be learned about his preaching from approximately two hundred of his sermon outlines which have survived, mainly written on pages measuring approximately $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 9 inches (187mm x 230mm), folded once, with a text at the head and a synopsis following, in ink, occasionally in pencil and sometimes on smaller sheets. New Testament texts predominate and Paul was clearly a favourite – “Paul was a very remarkable man”. In the Old Testament, Genesis, Isaiah and the Psalms of David are drawn on frequently. The outlines are written in English, though for delivery in Gaelic.

His accounts of preaching tours show him at work, speaking whenever there was an opportunity, distributing tracts and visiting people in their homes, and also describe his reactions to sermons he heard. In the early summer of 1838 he travelled from Barra to North



Figure 5: Independent Chapel, Cornaig, Tiree

Uist. On 3 June, the Lord's Day, in Barra he remarks that the Church of Scotland service did not commence until 1 p.m.

The sermon was very barren, not calculated to be useful to a single soul, and I should suppose from want of attention that none of the hearers would take a single sentence with them. Such a death-like scene I never witnessed. At the conclusion of his discourse I commenced outside in the shelter of the church, but owing to a very heavy shower of rain, we had to take shelter in a house not far distant. All the people came to hear with the exception of a few who look upon themselves as the gentry. I suppose they considered it under their dignity to hear a Dissenting preacher.

Travelling on to Eriskay two days later he found local residents engaged in clipping their sheep but they "did not seem to be well up to their work. I was vexed to see the poor creatures awkward as they were and could not help giving them some directions". In South Uist on the 9th he encountered a funeral. "After the interment the drinking commenced, and before they gave over a good many of them were quite intoxicated. I thought there was no place so bad as Tyree, but I found this place is much worse."

Travelling on foot and preaching most days, sometimes more than once, and to Protestants and Catholics, he journeyed through South Uist and across to Benbecula and North Uist. By the 25th he was making his way to Lochmaddy when he encountered a group of eighty men constructing what is known locally as the "Committee Road", an estate project designed to provide work in return for charitable support at a time when the first potato blight had made an appearance. Here we see his capacity for taking in a situation and selecting a text appropriately:

I asked the overseer if the men could hear a sermon, who told me they would, who took a whistle out of his pocket and whistled with. And they all gathered immediately. They sat amongst the heather

on the side of a hill and I preached to them from the broad and narrow way.

The emigrant dimension

When Farquharson arrived in Tiree relatively little overseas emigration had taken place, and the population of the island, which measured only fourteen miles by six, was rapidly moving to its peak of five thousand. Apart from a small settlement created in Brock Township north-east of present-day Toronto from about 1818, what there had been was mainly to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, and in reports to the Glasgow Colonial Society Alexander mentions encountering Tiree settlers in the course of his peregrinations. In the decade following, and particularly during the Potato Famine years from 1846 onwards, this situation was to change dramatically, with approximately two thousand individuals leaving for what is now Ontario.¹⁸ Archibald Farquharson apparently considered going with them, for in one of his letters his brother John advises him on emigration matters, and he was no doubt able to advise would-be emigrants on the basis of information supplied by his brothers there. Tiree's most famous bard, Iain mac Ailein, John Maclean, had emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1819, and his songs, and his correspondence with relations in Tiree, would also have fed their perceptions of Canada. But he remained in the island and instead trained a protégé, Neil MacKinnon (1800-1875), a joiner from Cornaigbeg, to serve the emigrant groups. The obituaries of a number of these settlers mention Farquharson's influence on their religious development in the pre-emigration period.

MacKinnon founded the Brock Gaelic Mission near Manilla in the Tiree community created earlier, which formed a bridgehead for many emigrants of the 1846-1852 period before they moved further west in Ontario to Grey and Bruce Counties as they were opened up for settlement. In 1853 he removed to Grey County himself and after

¹⁸ See Margaret A. Mackay, "Nineteenth Century Tiree Emigrant Communities in Ontario", *Oral History*, ix, no 1 (Autumn 1981), 49-60.

several years there moved on to Bruce.¹⁹ An emigrant family of Lamonts from the same township as MacKinnon provided land for an Independent chapel on a corner of their farm on the 10th concession of Kincardine Township, a building (fig. 6) which, though built of wood, bore a strong resemblance in its proportions to Farquharson's stone chapel there.

In a memoir²⁰ of a summer charge in Grey County in 1879, Presbyterian minister the Rev. Dr J. Chisholm recalled the Tiree community of MacIntyre (or MacIntyre's Corners) in the Township of Osprey. Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists there had been using the local schoolhouse for worship. But it proved too small to accommodate the congregations.

Therefore the people united and erected a square log building where the old cemetery now is. The structure was free to all denominations to use it for worship. It was provided by benches only and [a] square box used for a pulpit.

Farquharson the hymn-writer

Another feature of Archibald Farquharson's outreach came in the form of Gaelic hymn composition. It was his custom to suggest melodies which would have been widely known at the time to which his spiritual verses could be sung. These included tunes associated with Scots or Gaelic songs – "Hey Johnny Cope", "Ye banks and braes", "Whistle o'er the lave o't", "Auld lang syne", "Scots wha hae" (and variants "I'm wearing awa', Jean" and "The land o' the leal"), "Crodh Chailean", "Cha tig Mór mo bhean dhachaidh", "MacGriogair o Ruadh-shruth", "Calum crùbach", "Bha mi aig banais am baile Ionaraora" and "Air faill erinn ill erinn", for example. And he was notable for attaching pipe

¹⁹ Obituary of the Rev. Neil MacKinnon, *The Canadian Independent*, vol. xxi, no. 11, May 1875, 382-3.

²⁰ This is contained in a letter from the Rev. Dr J. Chisholm to the Rev. Art Macpherson dated November 1, 1931, a copy of which is in the possession of the author.



Figure 6: Congregational Church, Bruce County, Ontario

tunes to some of his hymn texts such as “Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mor” and “A bhodaich nam briogais”. The late Hugh MacEachern, blacksmith in Cornaigbeg, told of the family tradition of Farquharson discussing pipe tunes with his great grandmother, Margaret Maclean from Mull, whose father Neil had been piper to Campbell of Airds and winner of the first Highland Society of London piping prize at the Falkirk Tryst.²¹ The late Donald Sinclair in West Hynish believed that Farquharson was an exponent of the pipes himself.²²

Among the items listed for Archibald Farquharson in the Rev. Donald Maclean’s *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica*²³ and the *Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue*²⁴ are four collections of hymns printed between 1866 and 1871 plus a fifth with no date given.²⁵ His 1843 publication on the Atonement contains hymns in addition to the poem made for his brother. Additionally, he had printed by James Millar in Oban an elegy composed on the death of his daughter Isabelle (Iseabail) in 1865 which he intended to be sung, for he gives the tune as “The land o’ the leal”. MacDonald of Ferintosh was noted for his evangelical elegies, intended as hymns, and Farquharson may have been following his lead here. The Gaelic Hymn Book, *Laoidhean Soisgenlach*, issued in 1899, 1913 and 1922 by the Glasgow Gaelic Mission, includes five of his hymns, while in 1924 Archibald Sinclair, the Glasgow firm which had published it and Farquharson’s 1866, 1868 and 1871 hymns, brought out a collection of thirty-five of his hymns, *Laoidhean Shioin* for, as the Preface states, they “seem still to retain their freshness and

²¹ School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive, SA 1974/131 A.

²² School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive, SA 1968/244 B.

²³ Donald Maclean, *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica* or *Books Printed in the Gaelic of Scotland, 1567-1914* (Edinburgh, 1915), 116-9.

²⁴ Mary Ferguson and Ann Matheson, *Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue* (Edinburgh, 1984), 61-2.

²⁵ In his *Unsectarian Gaelic mission*, p. 4, Farquharson makes the startling claim that “during the last seven years I have composed more poems in Gaelic than any other man ever did before me”.

power and have a wonderful influence on the lives of Highland people to the present day”.

In the later years of his career Archibald Farquharson's published output shows signs of two major concerns: antisectarianism and millenarianism, which connected with his advocacy of Gaelic. In his pamphlet of 1872, *The unsectarian Gaelic mission*, he reflects²⁶ on how events seven years earlier had opened his understanding. In the course of composing his elegy for Isabelle, he reflected on the subject of baptism, which had come to loom large in her familial relationships. Wife of a Baptist pastor, she had been excluded from the Lord's table of the Baptists until, on advice, she sought adult baptism. But when she visited Tiree, Farquharson writes, “for fear of giving offence to the Church of which her husband was pastor, she did not sit with us at the Lord's table. It was impossible for me not to feel on account of these facts”.

He sought divine aid over the question of the divisive nature of such matters and an answer came, “like a peal of rattling thunder after a flash of lightning (an image used in his poetry) – ‘No, no, baptism shall no longer disturb the peace and harmony of God's people when Christ shall come’”. His depression was lifted and he began to focus on the coming of Christ to the extent that “for several weeks I could not sleep above three or four hours during the night, which made my nearest relatives afraid of me, that they seriously wished that I would give up my singing, my hymn-making, my preaching and praying”.

In the years following he pressed the concept of a mission to Gaelic speakers which transcended denominational boundaries in a range of pamphlets published in Gaelic and English such as *The Church of the Millennium Worshipping in Glen Tilt by the Merrily Singing Lark* (1866), *Christ's Forerunner to the Highlands* (1870), *The World's Jubilee Trimpet* (1871), and *The Coming of Christ the Hope of the*

²⁶ A. Farquharson, *The unsectarian Gaelic mission*, 2-3.

Church (1873).²⁷ And the importance of preaching in their own tongue to speakers of Scots (to which he admits he had once been averse) and of Gaelic was never far from his thoughts. He revels in imagery which compares hearers' countenances to doors and shutters closed at an English discourse with the contrast of windows flung open and an outward gaze when they are addressed in Gaelic.²⁸

Conclusion

When the legacy of Archibald Farquharson is evaluated, his stance on Gaelic is highly significant, its importance for teaching, for learning, for preaching. This was a matter current in the final years of his life, which saw the Education Act (Scotland) of 1872, with its ambivalent attitude towards the language. In his family and well beyond his staunch support was recalled. In 1883 there was correspondence between two of his nephews. Thomas's son Alexander, who was an under-factor on the Blair Drummond estate in Stirlingshire, wrote to his cousin Alexander, in Canada, who had followed his father Alexander into the ministry. There were enclosures in the letter, a photograph of their uncle Archibald and a copy of the poem he had composed on his last meeting with Alexander (Appendix 2), and the nephew writes of him:

He was very fond of the Gaelic language and took me with him (12 years ago) to the Island [Tiree] a winter to get a thorough knowledge of it. I could read the Gaelic fine before I went but received an extra polish at his hands. He was an excellent preacher and a grand old man. Uncle Archibald composed a great many Gaelic Hymns and I will send you one of his books with my next letter.

²⁷ Many of Archibald Farquharson's publications were printed by the firm of Archibald Sinclair in Glasgow, which gave staunch support to Gaelic and Gaelic causes over a long period.

²⁸ A. Farquharson, *The unsectarian Gaelic mission*, 5.

The Rev. Donald Maclean, in the final entry on Farquharson in his *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica*, calls him "one of the greatest enthusiasts that ever lived for the fostering of a knowledge of the Gaelic language".

We know less of Alexander's contribution to the longevity of Gaelic in Cape Breton but when he died at least three Gaelic elegies were composed for him there.²⁹ And the firm establishment of the church in Cape Breton is his lasting legacy.

The careers of both missionaries, carried out an ocean apart, offer a picture of individuals who were strongly motivated but not afraid to admit to weakness. Alexander is reputed to have carried leeches with him to apply to his feet when sore and swollen on his preaching tours.³⁰ In their new communities their lives became the stuff of narrative accounts, sometimes achieving a "larger than life" status. Tiree tradition-bearer Donald Sinclair recalled hearing of *Cadal mòr Mhic Fhearchair*, "Farquharson's long sleep". He slept as if in a coma and was annoyed when woken: "Why did you wake me? I was in heaven!"³¹

Archibald Farquharson's career in Tiree can be seen in terms of activity which responded to a sequence of situations at home and in the wider world, both personally and publicly. In his first decade he built the Congregational following up from low numbers to a healthy size. His second decade was dominated by the haemorrhaging of the Tiree population as approximately two thousand of its five thousand population, including many of his followers, emigrated mainly to the part of British North America which was to become Ontario, Canada. (At the end of his life a further wave of emigration, to the Canadian prairies, was to take place.) His response to this was a robust one, ensuring that a missionary was trained to accompany them and serve the emigrant communities and providing the foundation of lay leadership

²⁹ Letter of John Farquharson, 23 September 1859.

³⁰ Donald McMillan, *History of Presbyterianism in Cape Breton, with brief memoriam sketches of the lives of Rev. Hugh McLeod D.D., Rev. Matthew Wilson, Rev. Alex. Farquharson and other pioneer ministers of Cape Breton* (n.p. 1897), 13.

³¹ School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive, SA 1968/244 B. This phrase was used locally to describe someone who had overslept.

and the independent congregational structure well-suited to those new settlements. In the last years of his life he was a prolific hymn composer and pamphleteer, emphasising Gaelic and the loosening of denominational boundaries in bilingual publications aimed at a wide audience.

Significantly, both brothers were firmly based within their Gaelic culture. They were proud of the bardic gifts the family shared and a knowledge of piping and pipe tunes as well as secular songs characterised Archibald's hymn composition while Alexander upheld the piping tradition in Cape Breton. We see them working in a world where oral tradition and print culture intersected and where English and Gaelic could be used for both public and private communication. These family sources provide insights into the personalities and working lives of two men for whom secular and religious life were interconnected, linked in important ways by language and kinship. There are extensive resources here for further research.³²

University of Edinburgh

³² A full study of the life and work of Archibald Farquharson is in preparation.

Appendix 1³³

New Castle Miramichi New Brunswick
9 Sept 1833

Thomas Farquharson Straloch
By Blairgowrie
Perthshire

My Dear Brother

By this you will be happy to learn that I am yet spared in the land of the living, and enjoy good health for which I have reason to be thankful. When I came to Greenock Brother John was away two days previous. I sailed on Sabbath 16 June arrived in Halifax on the 21 July, that day 5 weeks. Sent my Luggage to Cape Breton went by the coach to Pictou a distance of 102 miles in order to see the ministers of our church in the Province of Nova Scotia who were assembled at a communion there. In the town of Pictou I landed at the house of Donald Fergusson cousin of the Fergussons at the Milton of Inverchroskie who came out 15 years ago and was shipwrecked near Cape Breton and lost all that he had. I lived in his house a week and I never met with a more kind family than himself and his wife were to me all my life. Tho he lost all that he had when [*sic*] came out from Scotland yet by his own industry he has recovered again he has a good deal of land property and several valuable houses in the town of Pictou besides he is an elder in the church of Pictou and beloved and esteemed by all who know him. When you see his Friends in the miltown tell them of his well being and also Charles Fergusson Dalnabrik [Dalnabreck]. I left Pictou on the 2nd of August in a vessel a distance of nearly 100 miles and landed on the south west coast of Cape Breton and had to travel to the place to which I sent my Luggage perhaps about 80 miles to the north east side of the

³³ Minimal editorial interventions only have been carried out on this text; these are indicated in square brackets. Abbreviated forms have been expanded, but Farquharson's capitalisation, punctuation and spellings have been retained.

island but got most of the way by water as I proceeded to a large lake in the middle of the Island I met highland people whom I found exceedingly kind to me Some of them conveyed me near 30 miles by water in a boat When I came to the place to which I intended to bring my Luggage from Sydney the town to which I sent it from Halifax 6 men went in a boat with me and brought all along with them. When I reached the town where my Luggage was I got a letter from the Moderator of the Presbytery of this Province from which I now write you to appear in this town on the 4th of Sept. in order to be ordained by the Presbytery then to meet. This letter was in answer to a letter which I had with me from Dr Burns³⁴ Paisely [*sic*] to them to have me ordained as soon as possible. I then had to retrace my steps back again and proceed on a journey of nearly 400 miles. When I got my things settled in the house of a kind family from Ross Shire 3 men went with me by a boat very near 40 miles and landed me in one of the places in which I preached on my way through the Island before Here I remained a Sabbath and the people here conveyed me another piece till I came to the end of the large Bras Dor Lake in the middle of Cape Breton. I then travelled about 13 or 14 miles and next day got a vessel which conveyed me to my Friend Donald Fergusson's at Pictou. I remained in his house from Wednesday till Saturday till I got another vessel which conveyed me to this place where the Presbytery met. I arrived here on Thursday last and after having attended two meetings of Presbyteries one on Friday and another on Saturday morning I was ordained after sermon in the afternoon. I am now ready to return to Cape Breton again in the same vessel in which I came from Pictou she sails tomorrow. I

³⁴ The Rev. Dr Robert Burns (1789-1869) was minister of St George's, or the Laigh Parish Kirk, Paisley from 1811 to 1843, when he joined the Free Church. He was one of the founders, and secretary, of the Society for Promoting the Religious Interests of Scottish Settlers in British North America (the Glasgow Colonial Society), begun by the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr in 1825. He himself emigrated to Canada in 1845, where he was active in Presbyterian Church affairs as both a minister (Knox Church, Toronto, 1845-1856) and professor (Knox College, Toronto, 1856-1864).

have written to my employers in Edinburgh and I write this with a view to send it by the captain of a vessel named the *Isabella* going off to Greenock tomorrow. I have not heard from John or Finlay yet I wrote to Findlay from Pictou the first time I was in ... [hole in paper] I have enjoyed good health since I left ... was not the least sick on the sea. I like the ... and my situation in Cape Breton better than I expected. I would have written sooner but delayed till I would land safe in C Breton. I then thought I would put off till I could have the pleasure of letting you know of my ordination.

Tell John McKenzie or Mary that I saw Isabel's sister and her husband they live in the next town to that in which I left my chests ... which I intend to make my home all winter. They are all well and have a large family. Their Aunt lives at Pictou is in health and is expected to come to Cape B soon She has no farm I shall write more afterwards about them all. Tell Alexander Fergusson the Elder or Peter his son that I met their Friend³⁵ Robert Fergusson Esquire the old man – He was the Elder with the minister of his Parish at the Presbytery I found him very kind to me when he heard I was from the Parish of Moulin. He was asking for you all he is stout and healthy a man of great property

I have no time nor paper at present to give a description of America. But will write a little perhaps in my next. I write this in haste merely to let you all know of my wellbeing when I arrived in Halifax. I sent a newspaper addressed to you in which my arrival in the *Jane Hastie* was mentioned which if you got might satisfy you at the time. I shall write if spared some time before Martinmass. I desire to be Kindly Remembered to my Dear Father and Mother Sister and Brothers etc. etc. etc though the great atlantic ocean with its mighty billows rolls between us I have all near and dear to my heart and tho my eyes fill when I seriously think of you I do not regret that I came over to this place. Fare well may the Almighty God who is every where present

³⁵ The term *friend* here is the Scots usage, meaning a relative, blood-relative or kinsperson.

both by sea and by land be your Saviour and portion in time and thro
Eternity

Your affectionate Brother
Alexander Farquharson

Send word to John Buttar and Sister that I am well with my best
respects not forgetting Ippi. Am bheil cuin aic air *Unk* fhast [trans.:
Does she still remember Unk]

(Adress to me)

Reverend A Farquharson
Boulartrie Island
By Sydney Cape Breton
North America

Appendix 2

CUIMHNEACHAN.

Mo bheannachd dhuit an drasda
 A bhrathair th'ann Ceap-breatain thall,
 Ge fad thu uam 's an fhasach
 Mo chridh tha 'n gradh gle cheangailt riut;
 'S ann ann an cladh Cill-mhicheil,
 Aig eaglaise na sgìreachd,
 Far am bheil na mìltean
 Nan luidh sinne a dhealaich sinn.

Far am bheil uisg' Ard-uil
 Gun tamh do seach gu farumach,
 A' teagasg do 'n luchd-aitich',
 Gu bas gu 'm bheil nan deannaibh iad,
 Gu 'm bheil gach gineal dhaoine,
 Dol seachad sìos gun traoghadh,
 'S gach nì ta anns an t'saoghal
 Gu 'm bheil gu caochladh cabhaig air,

Nach cuimhne leat na laithean
 Gu brath nach tig n'ar caramh-ne,
 'Nuair bha sinn anns an àit' sin
 Nì blath's a chur n'ar n'aighidhean?
 Nach iomadh car le cheile,
 Thug sinn feadh ghleann a's shleibhtean,
 'Nuair bha sinn air bheag cille,
 'S air sligh' na reit' tur aineolach.

Ach, 'nuair a thain' an uine
 Chaidh suilean thoirt a dh'fhaicinn duinn,
 Mor aingidheachd ar giulain,
 'S 'n eas-umhlachd bha n'ar n' anamna,
 Gu 'n robh sinn truailidh trailleil,
 A'm braighdeanas aig satan,
 A'n naimhdeas dian do'n ard-Rìgh,
 'S cur cul ri gras 's ri flaitheanas.

(Translation)

A MEMENTO

My greetings to you now / brother over the sea in Cape Breton / though
far from me in the wilderness / my heart is closely bound to you in love;
it was in Kilmichael churchyard / at the parish church / where there are
thousands / lying sleeping that we parted.

Where the Arduil water / flows past incessantly and noisily / instructing
the inhabitants / that they are hastening toward death / that every
generation of men / passes on without stopping / and everything in the
world/ is hastening towards death.

Don't you remember the days / which we'll never experience again,
when we were in that place / which warms our spirits / many a stroll
together / we took through glen and moors / when we possessed little
understanding / and were completely ignorant of the way of salvation.

But when the time came / when our eyes were given the power to see /
the terrible wickedness of our behaviour / and the disobedience of our
souls / we were low and servile / in bondage to Satan / in strong
opposition to the King of Kings / rejecting grace and Heaven.

B'iad sud na laithean gruamach,
 Bha uamhasan a's lasraichean
 Air mullach Shinai shuas uainn,
 'S i gluasad leis na bagraidhean;
 'S Iehobhah fein o'n nial dhubh,
 Aig eigheach ruinn gu diana,
 "Teichibh as o'n t'sliabh so
 "Mu 'm brist mi sios mar dhealanaich!"

"Ach, ciod an taobh a theid sinn?"
 Sin 'n eigh a bha n'ar n' anamna,
 "'S sinn' 'n so a'm fasach cheine,
 "An eiginn chruaidh, 's sinn' airsnealach,
 "Gach tobar traight' gun diar ann,
 "Gach luibh a's blath 'n deigh crionadh,
 "Na speuran mar an t'iarunn,
 "'S mar umha criadh na 'm machraichean?"

Ceart amhail a bha Hagar
 'S an fhasach sgith air seacharan,
 A's mac a' cuim Ishmael
 'N deigh failneachadh le tartmhoireachd,
 'Nuair dh'fhosgail Dia a suilean,
 'S ann chunnaic i gle dhluth dhi,
 Beo thobair uisg a' bruchdadh,
 Chur surd na cridh a's geanalachd.

Is amhuil sin rinn Trocair
 Ar seoladh chum na carraige
 O'm bheil am fìor uisg' dortadh,
 'Bheir solasan bhios maireannach;
 A's thuirt i ruinn, "Lan olaibh,
 "Chum iota chasg is leoir e,
 "Gach cionta gruaim, a's doruinn
 "Sior fhogradh uaibh an amhainn so!"

What dark days these were / there were terrible sights and
conflagrations / on the summit of Sinai above us / while it seemed to
move with these threats / and Jehovah himself from a black cloud /
calling to us loudly / "Flee away from this hill/ lest I send down flashes
of lightning!"

"But what way shall we go?" / was the cry of our souls / "we are here in
a remote wilderness / in dire straits, and melancholy / every well dry,
not a drop of water / every plant and flower withered / the skies like iron
/ and the machairs like caves of clay!"

Just like Hagar / wandering exhausted in the wilderness / and the son of
her flesh, Ishmael / having fainted with thirst / when God opened her
eyes / she saw very close to her / a spring of water bubbling / which
brought joy and cheerfulness to her heart.

So did Mercy / steer us to the rock / from which the pure water flows /
bringing joys that will endure / and she said to us, "Drink your fill / it
will suffice to slake thirst / every fault, gloom and pain / this river will
banish from you for ever!"

B'e sud an sealladh caoimhneil,
Thug aoibhneas tha do-labhairt duinn;
Gach cionta gruaim a's oillte,
Mar oidhche theich, 's thain' latha oirnn';
'S neul dubh a's dorch a's gruamach,
Chur eagal oirnn' a's uamhunn,
Dh'fhas aoidheil geal gun bhuaireas,
'S ghrad sheall sinn suas le h'aiteas ris! ³⁶

³⁶ The Gaelic reproduced here is as printed, without length marks.

It was an agreeable vision / which gave us indescribable happiness /
every fault, gloom and horror / fled like the night, and the light of day
shone on us / and the black, dark and forbidding cloud / which filled us
with fear and terror / became welcoming, white without blemish / and
immediately we looked up to it with delight!

